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Pennsylvania Public
Television Network.
Get Ready for the Digital
Revolution

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pptn

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Get Ready for the Digital Revolution

We live in a world of constantly changing technology. In recent years we've experienced the transition from records to CDs, from typewriters to computers. We've embraced the information age!

Now, we're on the brink of a technological revolution in television. The analog television standard we use today has been around since the 1940s. In more than 50 years, little has changed in the way TV signals are delivered to our homes. But change is coming. Today, we're moving toward a communications revolution called *digital television (DTV)* that will allow viewers to interact with television in ways never dreamed possible.

Why DTV?

In 1997, the FCC ruled that all broadcasters in the country, both commercial and public, would move to digital transmission in a staggered schedule starting in 1998 to meet the deadline of 2003. The rapidly approaching digital era means much more efficient use of the nation's airwaves to meet our communications needs.

At the same time, DTV gives you—the viewer, the taxpayer, the educator, the student, the business person, the parent, the employee—simultaneous access to as many as six channels of quality educational programming from Pennsylvania's public television stations. To meet the 2003 deadline, Pennsylvania's digital TV transition process is already under way as we phase in our technological and financial commitment.

Getting Personal

What does this mean to the average viewer?

In a word: opportunity. More free over-the-air programming opportunities, higher quality transmission, and complementary data services are all part of the digital future.

Multicasting—Picture a day at home when you'll simultaneously have the choice of tuning in the Ready to Learn service for preschool children, a "university of the air," adult education and GED classes, tourism promotion, arts and cultural programming, or job training.

Today, if we're broadcasting children's programs, then we're not airing work force training or a college telecourse. We're like a library with limited shelf space—we have lots of valuable material sitting in storage that can't be used with our one analog channel.

However, in the near future, we'll be able to expand our "shelf space" to broadcast up to six times more educational programming than we do now. In the digital era, public television can multicast, or simultaneously broadcast, up to six channels during the day with educational programming serving all sectors of the population. Despite the 500-channel universe of cable and satellite programming now available, only public television will offer universal access to high-quality noncommercial educational programming. With digital transmission, that universal access is even more valuable.

Datacasting—Additionally, DTV allows the transmission of related data to a viewer's set or computer. This data component could take the form of printed material like program transcripts, computer software, or Internet-like Web pages that complement the program airing. Adding a whole new layer to educational programming, this data component allows you, the viewer, to become a participant, rather than just an observer, in the broadcast experience.

High Definition TV—At night, the prime-time schedule could be broadcast in high definition television (HDTV) allowing viewers to enjoy crystal-clear wide-screen transmissions with CD-quality sound audio.

Will my television set become obsolete?

It will be many years before the analog sets become obsolete. Until then, consumers will be able to buy set-top adapters to receive the digital signal. While the cost of consumer-grade digital televisions is very high today, the prices will undoubtedly drop as demand increases.

Time line

Although public television's deadline of 2003 may seem to be years away, it's just around the corner in terms of planning for DTV. Public television's strategy is to have all of the stations funded and equipped to transmit a digital signal and to have PPTN continue its interconnection mission with an all-digital network by the deadline.

Funding

Pennsylvania public television appreciates the visionary leadership which Governor Tom Ridge and the General Assembly have provided the network and stations in the conversion to DTV. Public television is seeking a total of $16.57 million from the Commonwealth over a three-year period which will meet almost one-third of the statewide conversion costs—to exceed $50 million.

Federal funds are expected to be available on a matching basis through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce. Also, financial help to the stations will come through a variety of collaborations and from private funds, including significant capital campaigns.

The "techno-babble"—how DTV works

Today's television signal is in an analog format which has been the standard since the 1940s—one channel uses the entire signal. The digital future of television means signals are transmitted in the computer code of ones and zeros. Using digital transmission, more information can be compressed into one signal. This means that you, the viewer, will have many more choices.

Public Television in Pennsylvania

WLVT-TV/Channel 39	Allentown
WQLN-TV/Channel 54	Eric
WITF-TV/Channel 33	Harrisburg
WHYY-TV/Channel 12	Philadelphia
WYBE-TV/Channel 35	Philadelphia
WQED-TV/Channel 13	Pittsburgh
WVIA-TV/Channel 44	Wilkes Barre/Scranton
WPSX-TV/Channel 3	University Park
Pa. Public Television Network (PPTN)	Hershey

Estimated Digital Conversion Time Line

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2006
FCC mandates digital television.	Network owned and operated stations in top 10 markets agreed to put digital signal on air. First high definition televisions on sale for Christmas season. WITF-DT on air.	NBC, CBS, ABC and Fox stations in top 10 markets must be on by 5/99—remaining NBC, CBS, ABC and Fox stations in top 30 markets must be on by 11/99. WHYY-DT on air. PPTN begins digital testing with stations.	WLVT-DT on air. WVIA-DT on air. WPSX-DT on air. WQED-DT on air.	WQLN-DT on air. WYBE-DT on air. PPTN interconnecting all stations.	All commercial stations are required to transmit via digital signal.	All public broadcasting stations are required to transmit via digital signal.	The old channel (analog) is scheduled to be returned for auction if penetration of digital reception reaches 85 percent of households in a market. (This deadline may be pushed back significantly.)

Pennsylvania Public Television Network
24 Northeast Drive • P.O. Box 397 • Hershey, Pennsylvania 17033
(717) 533-6011 • www.pptn.org